Chapter XXII

SUGAR BEETS AS A CROP IN POLK COUNTY AND THE RED RIVER VALLEY

The fact that the clayey soils of the Fargo and Bearden series, the topography and climate were ideal for sugar beet culture, brought three sugar processing plants to the Red River Valley and established the sugar beet as a major cash crop in the area. With two of the sugar factories in Polk County, one at East Grand Forks, one at Crookston and a third factory at Moorhead, good outlets for the beet crops are provided for the border counties of both Minnesota and North Dakota.

Aerial view of American Crystal Sugar Plant at Crookston with six sugar storage silos in construction 1959-60.

A brief summary of facts pertaining to the recognition of the economic value and first culture of the sugar beet in this county should be of interest. The fact that sugar produced from the sugar beet was identical to the sugar produced from sugar cane was first proved by German chemist, Andreas Marggraf, in the year 1747. The first attempt to produce beet sugar in North America was at North Hampton, Massachusetts, when 1300 pounds of sugar was produced in 1839. The project failed commercially as did similar small plants which were built in Michigan, Utah and California.

The first successful factory processing sugar beets, however, was established at Alvarado, California in 1879. This plant has been in continuous operation since that time with its moderniza-